

From Aunt Olivia's kitchen - meatloaf magic

by Lydia Lovell

Probably there are more ways to prepare meatloaf than there are cooks, and that's lots of meatloaf recipes. But because most masters and mistresses of the kitchen vary their meatloaves' ingredients to suit the occasion and the contents of the pantry, proliferation is inevitable... and still growing.

Some people start with a pound or so of ground beef... regular, lean, or extra lean; others prefer a mixture of ground meats, usually equal quantities of veal, pork, and beef; these are found packaged together at many supermarket meat counters. Since meat is the basic ingredient, we have several possibilities just for starters. If your family includes a successful deer hunter, combine ground venison with ground pork for a meatloaf supreme.

Materials to bind the ground meat and to enhance flavor should be added. Many recipes call for an egg; some use canned mushroom, tomato or celery soup; some say whole fresh milk; and some, a can of evaporated milk.

Most suggest chopped green pepper, and/or chopped onion, and/or chopped celery. Spices may or may not include salt, pepper, poultry seasoning, minced parsley, crushed garlic, sliced mushrooms, crumbled bits of crisp-cooked bacon, or strips of raw bacon laid over the top of the loaf before the pan is popped into your oven to bake.

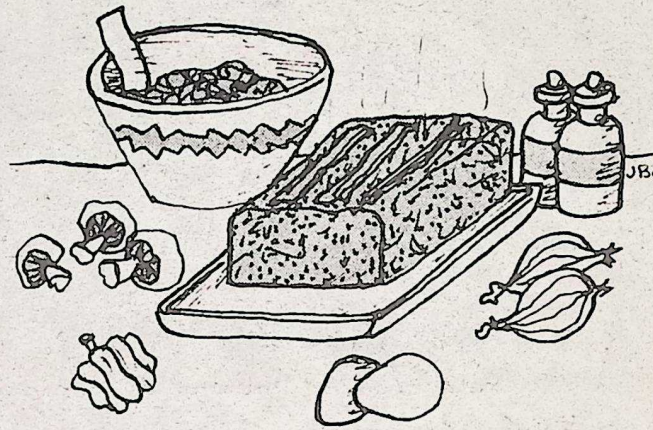
Meatloaves arrive on the table with or without sauces or gravy. Either may be drizzled over the slices or served in a bowl so diners may help themselves. Sauces include those of tomato, and gravies are made from pan drippings after the loaf has been lifted from the pan, drained, and placed on its platter.

One of the best meatloaf recipes, and also one of the simplest, was scrawled on the back of a yellowed-with-age, torn-in-half envelope discovered tucked into an old Fannie Farmer Cook Book that's been handed down through the family from generation to generation. Not only easy and good, this recipe also forms a base for variations that the contents of your refrigerator might suggest.

BASIC MEATLOAF

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 lb. lean ground beef | 1/4 C. chopped onion |
| 1/2 C. fresh milk | 1 tsp. poultry seasoning |
| 1 can tomato sauce (8 oz.) | 1 tsp. salt |
| 1 unbeaten egg | 1/4 tsp. black pepper |
| 1/4 C. chopped green pepper | 1 C. bread crumbs |

Preheat oven to 350°. Place thawed ground beef in a medium-sized bowl; pour milk over meat, and mix together with fork. Set aside. In a small bowl break an egg, add chopped vegetables and seasonings, mix with fork, add bread crumbs and stir well. Add contents of small bowl to meat and



milk mixture. Blend thoroughly, turn resulting mixture into a 5x9x3" pan, and bake for one hour. Serves four.

This recipe may be varied in any number of ways. Add a clove of crushed garlic; use chopped celery instead of green pepper . . . or use both. Substitute oatmeal, dry, for bread crumbs. Use seasoned bread crumbs or ones you make yourself by crumbling dried heels of bread saved for the purpose. Slice three or four, or more, fresh mushrooms, and toss in with the other vegetables. Omit the tomato sauce and double the quantity of milk. Skip poultry seasoning, and try a half-teaspoon of dried thyme. Or substitute a teaspoon of oregano, if you prefer its flavor.

To make gravy, remove the loaf from its pan when you take it from the oven, pour off all but about two tablespoons of fat retaining the juices, blend two tablespoons of flour or one of cornstarch with a half-cup of cool water, and thicken pan juices, scratching into the gravy any bits of meat sticking to the pan. Add enough boiling water as the juices thicken to arrive at the desired consistency. Stir constantly to prevent lumps.

Serve gravy in a bowl and let folks ladle on the amounts they desire. In some households ketchup is a favorite accompaniment for meatloaves made without tomato sauce. Other people prefer it plain.

For variation on the theme, layered meatloaf offers both taste and eye appeal. Appearances can be deceiving, and are in this case, for preparation is uncomplicated and results are attractive enough for a company meal.

LAYERED MEATLOAF

- 1/2 pkg. (8 oz. size) herb-flavored bread stuffing mix
- 2 lb. lean ground beef
- 1 tsp. salt and other seasonings to taste
- 1/8 tsp. fresh-ground black pepper
- 1 small onion, minced
- 1/2 C. milk

Preheat oven to 350°. Grease lightly a 9x5x3" pan. Prepare stuffing as directed on package. Thoroughly combine remaining ingredients and layer into pan, meat, stuffing, meat, stuffing, meat. Pack firmly and press layers down to prevent separation when slicing. Bake one-and-one-quarter hours. Slice into twelve portions to serve six.

Sliced thin, left-over meatloaf (if there is such a thing!) is good sandwich filling for lunch, can be pan-fried for a breakfast treat, or served cold the second-time-around with a bubbly-hot macaroni and cheese casserole and tossed green salad.

We like baked Idaho potatoes with meatloaf and, depending on the season, asparagus, steamed cabbage wedges, baked acorn squash, or a big bowl of crisp fresh salad greens laced with oil and vinegar dressing.

Because meatloaf cannot be categorized as elegant, top off your dinner with a family-favorite dessert. Hot deep-dish apple pie served with a generous cube of aged cheddar cheese; a dish of green seedless grapes marinated in sour cream thinned half-and-half with bottled white grape juice and sweetened with honey to taste; or that old stand-by, vanilla ice cream with hot chocolate sauce.

For chocolate sauce that beats any and all those you can buy ready made, cook your own. Make it ahead of time and simmer in a double boiler while dinner is under way.

CHOCOLATE SAUCE

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| 1/2 C. sugar | 1 sq. bitter chocolate |
| 1 T. cornstarch | 1/2 C. cold water |

Combine ingredients and cook in small heavy saucepan on top of double boiler, stirring constantly to keep from burning until thickened. Remove from heat and add:

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 T. butter or margarine | 1 tsp. vanilla extract |
|--------------------------|------------------------|

Delicious! And good when spooned over slices of yellow cake. Any remainders will keep for several days, refrigerated in a small covered jar. Try this on cream puffs filled with whipped cream for an extra-special treat